



ROAD TO RENOVATION

Veteran band tour manager Rick Marino - who hosts a travel TV show called "State x State" that airs on the Planes, Trains + Automobiles network as part of Delta's in-flight entertainment - drives us to **SANTA BARBARA** to uncover an architectural mystery.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY RHIANNON COOPER



Back in December, I found myself looking to buy a house in south Palm Desert. I have lived in the area for some time and, having spent years designing and building music studios for my friends, I've always looked at the 'fixers' in my neighborhood with the intention of picking one some day and rebuilding it as my own.

After checking out several houses, I returned to the first place I stepped into. My Realtor had said, "I think the place was built by a known architect in the area." So, I did my research and quickly found out that it was, in fact, built by midcentury industrial designer and architect Walter S. White. You may have heard his name from the recent auction of his "Wave House" during Modernism Week.

I made an offer on the house and by mid-January it became mine. I made a trip down the Historical Society of Palm Desert to see what I could learn about White. To say I am glad I went down there would be an understatement. Merilee Colton and the staff were delighted to hear that I had bought the place and had the intention to restore it as close as possible to its original state.

The Historical Society, located on El Paseo, is well worth the trip for anyone into desert history. They have so much cool stuff to check out, from old Desert Magazines that date back to the '50s to original Carl Bray paintings of desert scapes (yes, I bought one!).

At the Historical Society, I learn that Palm Desert incorporated in 1973, and there are few records of anything built prior. They did show me the book that University of California, Santa Barbara professor Volker M. Welter had published on White (and yes, I bought that, too!), which focuses on his buildings and design. I then learned that the university has an archive of White's body of work. So for this month's road trip, I head to Santa Barbara.



I make an appointment at UCSB's Architecture and Design Collections, and head through L.A. I'm excited to get there, as Welter's book, *Walter S. White: Inventions in Mid-Century Architecture*, had listed my home in the index as 'The Ackerman House.' I thought it was so cool that I'd brought a house that had a name!

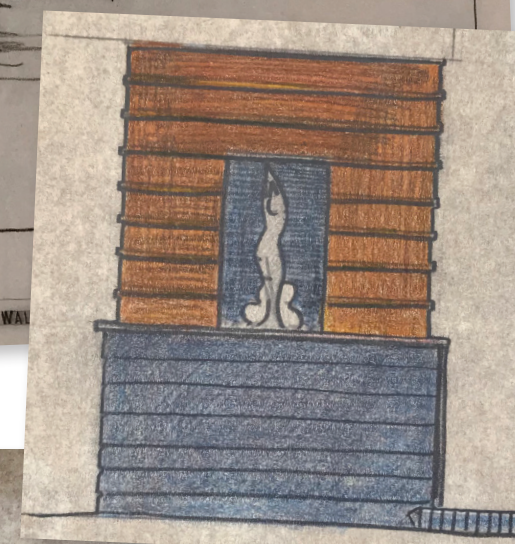
Before I head to the archive, my first stop in Santa Barbara is for early lunch at La Super-Rica Taqueria on Milpas, a small mid-century shack and patio. This place always gets a mention and for good reason: high-quality ingredients, unique family recipes and handmade tortillas. The especial is rajas (mild green chile and cheese) served over a couple tortillas. That is always on my order – you just can't go wrong! There usually is a line here, but it is worth the wait, so plan accordingly.

When I get to the archive building, it turns out the Ackerman House plans that had been labeled against my new address were not the actual plans to the house. The Ackerman House plans were for a much larger house that may have never been built. Frustrated by this, we proceed to look over dozens of blueprints that the archivist is kind enough to pull for me. After a few hours, I figure out that my house is a version of a Metro Home. White had designed a series of small houses that ranged in size from one to three bedrooms. (When I drive around, I am now able to identify three or four similar homes in my neighborhood.)

I leave with copies of the Metro Home series blueprints, and still a lot to figure out. From what I could see at the house, there had been two renovations completed prior to me buying it. I know that once I return to Palm Desert, I can peel some of these layers off to confirm my assumptions about the blueprints. But first, I have little exploring to do around Santa Barbara.

I head down State Street, the main drag in the center of town, for shopping and wine tasting. There are more 20 tasting rooms downtown, which is why it's called the Urban Wine Trail. It ends at the Pacific Ocean, at a place called Stearns Wharf. This is a great place to spend the afternoon for some chowder or a sunset drink and appetizers at one of the many restaurants located on the pier. On the weekends, the beach walk is lined with arts and crafts vendors all along Cabrillo Boulevard.

Before I leave, I grab dinner at Brophy Bros., one of my favorite places in California for fresh seafood. Maybe it's the location overlooking the harbor, where you can watch local fishermen offload their daily catch, or the raw bar you can sit at for the freshest clams. Whatever it is, I always find my way back here for lunch or dinner anytime I'm in town. Oh yeah, get the chowder too! As much as I want to stay, I have to get back home to my renovation.



Once home, I get to work and can now confirm I own a Walter S. White Metro Home. As I peeled off some drywall, I found some interesting aspects to White's original design and have been genuinely excited to find a lot of the original work. Probably one of the coolest features I have discovered is an ambient light box that runs through the center beam of the house.

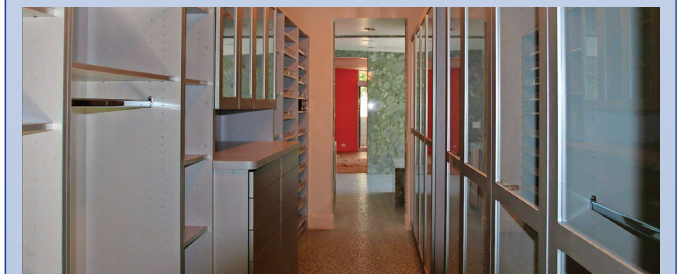
During Modernism Week, there was an awesome exhibit on White curated by the Historical Society. It was open every day for the modernism enthusiasts. At the same time that the Wave House was being auctioned, I found some time to peel away from my renovation to head to the exhibit at The Joslyn Center. As I made my way around the exhibit, I found a sketch by White of the exact light box I envisioned. I am now able to rebuild this feature from the sketched plans!

My renovation is coming together and I am excited to share the journey of the finished restoration. There is also so much more to Santa Barbara I can't wait to discover, but that is another road trip away. 🌱

Follow Rick Marino's travels on rickmarinotravels.com or on Instagram @rickmarinotravels. You can also write to him with questions at rickmarino@att.net.

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